

Friends

by Sandra

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Friends

> <meta name="Author"> Friends - by Sandra Schwarzer **Friends**

>A Sentinel short story
>by Sandra
Schwarzer<a>**

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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ANDROMEDE, CHRISTINA AND SONNEVI VERY MUCH FOR BETA READING THIS

It was long after midnight when Jim heard Blair enter the loft, as silent as could be. Nevertheless, Jim was awake. He had waited for the return of his Guide as he had done for days now.

He was worried about his partner. The last weeks had been hard on his friend. They had worked on a really nasty murder case, and aside from that, Blair had had to take over classes for a sick friend. The kid had been working nearly nonstop for the last two weeks.

Blair was dead on his feet. He had been grading tests the whole evening through. Now, only sheer willpower made him climb up the stairs to the loft. Thank God, tomorrow ...*oops*...make that today

would be Saturday. With the case solved and the tests done, Blair was looking forward to a

well-deserved free weekend. He opened the door as silently as he could, trying not to disturb Jim, and walked straight to his room. He didn't even bother to take his clothes off before he dropped on the bed. As soon as his head hit the pillow, he was asleep.

Jim heard Blair stumble to his room and the thump as Blair fell into his bed. Minutes later, the only sounds filling the loft were the steady heartbeat and the even breathing of his sleeping Guide. Jim got up and

walked down the stairs. He entered the small room of his Guide and was greeted by the sight of Blair sprawled bonelessly on the bed, fully dressed. He sighed and went to undress him carefully, not wishing to wake him from his much-needed sleep. Then he got a blanket from the couch in the living room

and tucked his friend in.

"Good night, Chief," he whispered to the sleeping form.

"Thanks," Blair mumbled in his sleep.

"That's what friends are for," Jim thought as he watched his sleeping Guide.

Blair woke at noon the next day to the smell of fresh coffee. Jim sat on his bed holding a cup of the hot liquid under his nose.

"Good morning, Sleeping Beauty. Are you up to eating something?" Jim asked.

"Morning...oh man, couldn't you have waited a few minutes longer? There was this blonde..." Blair started, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"Sandburg, I don't wanna know any of *your* dreams," Jim growled, and handed him the coffee. "Now are you ready to get dressed? I wanna go to that new restaurant on 2nd. My treat."

"Wait a moment, Jim. *You* are offering to take me out to a restaurant with you," Blair nodded skeptically. "A *real* restaurant. Uh-huh. You sure that it's not just another branch of 'Wonder Burger'?" he asked.

Jim smacked him on the head and said, "Yes, a *real* restaurant. Now you'd better hurry up if we wanna get there within this century." Then he got up and left the room.

Blair yawned and shook his head. "Well, whaddaya know? A *real* restaurant." He shrugged. Why look a gift horse in the mouth?

Jim went to the living room and grabbed the phone.

"Hi Simon."

"Hey Jim, you two ready to hit the road? I called Tracy again to make sure the cabin is stocked with everything you'll need during the week," Simon answered. "I also talked to the University to make sure that everything is covered. Officially Sandburg is going to a special conference in Seattle. By

the way, when did the kid come home yesterday?"

"Make that today. I think it was 2 a.m. Thanks you again for offering the cabin. I really appreciate that, Simon."

"No problem, Jim. You two are my best team, and you both need some time off after the Miller case. Now do me a favor and enjoy the vacation. I don't want to see you back in Cascade 'till next Sunday, and that's an order."

"Yes, sir. See you next week, and thanks again, Simon." Jim hung up the phone the minute Blair stepped out of his room.

"You're ready to hit the road, Chief?" he asked.

"Sure, big guy. Do you know where my red shirt is? You know, the one I wore on our last camping trip?" Blair asked.

Jim cocked an eyebrow. "Nope. Sorry. Maybe you should clean up that disaster area you call your room sometimes."

"Ha, ha. Very funny. Can we go now?"

They walked out of the door.

Blair hadn't noticed that more than just his red shirt was missing.

When they got into the truck, Blair saw two bags on the back seat.

Curious, he asked, "Hey, Jim, what's in those bags?"

"It's nothing, Chief. I have to bring them to a friend outside Cascade. Maybe we can drive over after lunch. What do you think?"

"I don't know, Jim. I'm really tired."

"Oh, come on, Chief. You can sleep during the ride up there."

"Wait a moment. You said 'up there'. What does that mean?" Blair asked, getting really curious now.

"It means the place is up near Rainier Mountain," Jim answered, just before he pulled into the parking lot in front of the

restaurant.

"Chinese? I should have known there was a catch," Blair said when they got out of the Expedition.

"Hey, at least it's definitely not 'Wonder Burger'. Come on. Let's get some meat back on you, Chief. You've lost a little too much weight during the last weeks."

Jim put an arm around his friend's shoulders and walked with him to the entrance.

They both enjoyed the meal. Blair had to admit that it was the best Chinese food he'd ever had. They talked all throughout the meal, nothing special, just the usual small talk between friends.

After they had finished, Jim paid their lunch. By the time Blair climbed back into the truck, though, he was really exhausted again.

Jim noticed the tired look on the face of his Guide. "You look wasted, Chief. You sure you wanna come with me?" he asked, knowing fairly well that Blair would never skip a chance to spend some time in the mountains.

Blair yawned, "As long as I don't need to make any complex conversation during the ride, I'll be fine, Jim."

"No, you can sleep. I'll listen to some music."

"Oh, no, not that Santana tape again," Blair groaned softly, momentarily forgetting about his friend's abilities.

Jim shot him a dirty look. Blair raised his hands in defeat. "Whatever you want, big guy." Then he placed his jacket between his head and the window and relaxed into the seat.

Jim turned the volume of the radio down until only he was able to hear it, without it being so low that he would need to concentrate too much and cause

a zone out.

They had barely left Cascade, but Blair was already deeply asleep.

Jim and Simon had planned to surprise Blair with this stay at the cabin ever since he had been involved in the 'Golden'-Case, but every time they had some free time, something would come up. If it wasn't police work, then it would be the University. This time they convinced the University that Blair needed to go to a conference with Jim. It had been a lie, but it was for Blair's sake.

The young man had never really talked about the Golden incident. Every time Jim tried to get him to open up, Blair would suddenly find something else he needed to do.

The Golden case wasn't the only reason for the trip, though. Jim knew that Blair liked being out in the open air with nature. This was his way of saying thank you, once in a while, for everything Blair had done for him since they'd met. These trips to the wilderness were something special for him, too. He came to know Blair better after each trip they spent out there.

The drive nearly took three hours, and it was late afternoon when Jim pulled to a halt in front of the big wooden cabin. Blair was still sleeping, so Jim decided to let him catch a few minutes more before breaking the surprise to him.

Jim opened the door to the cabin. It had a living room with an open fire place, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. He went back to the truck to get the bags from the back seat, then built a fire to warm the place.

By the time he returned it was already getting dark.

He opened the door to the passenger side. "Hey, Chief. Come on. It's time to wake up."

Blair stirred and opened his eyes. "Are we there yet?"

"Yes, we are. You slept for four hours, Sandburg. Now get up. I want to show you the cabin."

"The cabin. Your friend lives in a cabin?" Blair asked, still not fully awake.

"Sandburg, would you please get out of the car."

Blair eventually got out of the car, then stretched and inhaled the fresh air. "What a great place. I love it." He looked around. "So, where's your friend? I can only see our car here," he asked.

Jim smiled. "I think I have to tell you something Chief." He put his arm around Blair's shoulders for the second time that day and walked him over to the cabin.

"Is this going to be a new habit?" Blair asked, but never tried to shrug Jim's arm off.

Jim opened the door to the cabin and nudged Blair inside. "This is all ours for the whole of next week."

Blair gasped, "The whole week? That is **so** not possible. No, Jim, I....I can't. I have my classes...and what about the station?" he protested as he backed out, right back into Jim.

The Sentinel took him by the shoulders and turned him around again. "Relax, Blair. We've got everything covered. You don't need to go to the U until next Monday."

It took a few more minutes to convince Sandburg that everything was **really** covered, but when it finally sunk in, a smile spread on his face. "I can't believe it. **You** set me up! This is so great, man.

Why?"

"Because Simon and I were worried about you, Chief. You had a hard time dealing with the Golden stuff, and I think the Miller case was hard on you, too. And on top of that you had to work a double shift at the U..."

Blair reached over and stopped him in midsentence. "I get the picture, Jim. I'm okay. *Really.*"

Jim closed the door, and they sat down in front of the fireplace.

"The Golden was really hard, but you and Simon have reassured me a thousand times that none of what happened was my fault. I still don't believe it a hundred percent, but I'm sure I can leave it behind. The Miller case was hard, yeah, because I'm not the kind of guy that can check his humanity at the door. Now don't get me wrong here, Jim. I'm not saying that you're like that. But when I saw what he did to the little girls, I kinda lost it. Maybe I should have talked to you before now, but you know this isn't easy for me." He stopped and looked at Jim.

The only response from Jim was to open his arms and draw his friend into a hug, "I know this it's not easy for you, Blair, but I want you to know something. You're my best friend and I never wanna lose you over something like that. You know, I'm here for you like you are for me. I'm be there whenever you wanna talk, but I never want to force you to tell me anything if you are not ready for it."

Blair closed his eyes as he felt tears starting to run down his cheeks. "I know, Jim. It's about friendship, and man, you're the best friend I've ever had."

They sat there for a long time, and talked about things that really mattered to both of them.

They returned the next weekend, having learned more about each other in that period than they had during the last two years they'd spent working together. And they both were the better for it, secure in the knowledge that they would remain friends, no matter what might happen in the future.

THE END

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